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ABSTRACT

Overburdened by numerous non-teaching problems and pressures that occupy their daily lives, some secondary school teachers find very little time to address their primary task: that of teaching. As a result, many teachers are frustrated and dissatisfied with their job, and that means that their teaching suffers. Support for classroom teachers is needed to revitalize the troubled secondary school. A moderate restructuring of the secondary school or organization--a restructuring that includes a new stance for counselors and school psychologists--can become a source of providing direct support for teachers. Discussion focuses on: (1) three motivational needs of teachers; (2) counselors and school psychologists as systematic change agents; (3) four subsystems for school-wide problem solving; and (4) a consultative model for problem diagnosis. (Author)

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Help Through Organizing: A New Resource Within Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Overburdened by numerous non-teaching problems and pressures that occupy their daily lives, some secondary school teachers find very little time to address their primary task: that of teaching. As a result, many teachers are frustrated and dissatisfied with their job, and that means that their teaching suffers. Support for classroom teachers is needed to revitilize the troubled secondary school. A moderate restructuring of the secondary school or organization--a restructuring that includes a new stance for counselors and school psychologists--can become a source of providing direct support for teachers.

Discussion focuses on: three motivational needs of teachers; counselors and school psychologists as systemic change agents; four subsystems for school-wide problem solving; and a consultative model for problem diagnoses.

Sometimes a moderate re-structuring of a school organization can significantly improve the support of teachers' work. In this paper, I will describe three motivational needs that, if left unmet, may lead to the dissatisfaction of teachers with their jobs. Second, I will propose new helping roles in secondary schools to include more direct consultation with teachers. Third, I will point to four subsystems in which direct help can be given to teachers. And fourth, I will present a consultative scheme for diagnoses of problems. I will speak mainly about the role of secondary teachers, but many of the ideas will be easily transferable to elementary and middle schools.

It seems to me that most teachers today need more help than they are getting. Numerous problems and pressures occupy the daily lives of teachers and keep them away from their primary task of teaching; for example: crowded classrooms; laws regarding desegregation; shortages of supplies and materials; patrolling duties in restroom, hall, and playground; union strife over higher wages and greater benefits; unruly behavior of children; and isolation from colleagues. With those burdens, many teachers have become frustrated and dissatisfied, and their teaching suffers.

Three Motivational Needs

When the organization fails to satisfy the motivational needs of the worker, frustration or dissatisfaction is likely to occur, and performance on the job suffers. That fact is now so thoroughly documented in the organizational literature that we need not argue it. I will next say a few words about McClelland's motivational triad of achievement, affiliation, and power.

Achievement. McClelland noted that individuals generally seek out occupations in which they have a moderate to high chance of succeeding rather than those that invite failure. When the prospect of failing creeps into one's anxieties, one's achievement motivation goes down. That leads to a decline in the individual's productivity, creativity, and interest in the job. Consider for example, a high-school classroom. Suppose that in this classroom the majority of the students do not pay attention to the teacher, that they refuse to do assignments or follow directions, and that they threaten the teacher's control of the classroom. Very little teaching or learning can occur under those conditions. The teacher begins to feel like a failure.

Affiliation. Humans are social animals. They generally have a daily need to communicate with other humans of similar interests, goals, desires, and motivations. Generally, in their day-to-day work, secondary school teachers do not get much opportunity for any but the most superficial communication with their colleagues. Classrooms in high schools are fairly isolated from one another. Team teaching, for example, is also

not widely practiced in secondary schools. It is the rare high school in which teachers talk to each other or their principal about their classroom problems, techniques, and progress.

Power. Power is the capacity to exert influence over one's transactions with others. Within the high school classroom, the teacher often has complete control or managing power. The teacher decides who will speak and in what order; decides how instructional materials will be passed out; decides which students will get special priviledges; decides when a class period has officially ended. Beyond the classroom walls, however, power usually belongs to the school's administrators; especially to the principal. The manner in which a school principal uses power has strong effects on the teacher's morale.

New Support for Teachers

If teachers in today's high schools are to make headway against the problems and debilitating working conditions I have described, they will need help. They will need not just encouragement, but new opportunities within their school organization. I believe that counselors and school psychologists can become a source of that revitalizing help.

Within secondary schools, the roles of school psychologist and counselor currently provide only peripheral support to teachers. The major portion of work performed by the school's helping professionals does not deal with the school as an organization, but rather centers on the individual child. Several educators have argued that the most permanent part of the school organization (the adult staff) needs more

attention from the psychological services than parts that soon disappear (the students). They believe the traditional remedial model of mental health in schools has failed and they strongly recommended that schools move their psychological helpers into the role of systemic change agents.

Systemic change offers a way of using psychological services beside focusing them on the individual. As systemic change agents, school psychologists and counselors would concentrate on restoring the health of the school as an organization. They would do that through vigorous consultation with all members of the school's adult staff. This shift means the school's change agents would work with various subsystems on problems of the sort I have mentioned.

Adopting the stance of the systemic change agent does not mean that the school psychologist and the counselor would abandon all individualized work with students. They would still give attention to individual guidance and testing. However, the amount of energy focused on the individual child, specifically the child labeled "problem" or "atypical" would be reduced and refocussed on a systemic method for helping that child.

Four Subsystems of Support

The new efforts of the change agents would be mainly, though not solely carried out within subsystems. Four subsystems seem especially potent: (1) teacher-to-student interactions, (2) teacher-to-teacher interactions, (3) teacher-to-administrator interactions, and (4) teacher-to-parent interactions.

Teacher-to-student inteactions. These occur mostly in the classroom. The systemic change agent uses direct classroom intervention as the primary milieu in which to deal with problems of student behavior or learning. For example, if a teacher is having difficulties controlling a group of boisterous students, the teacher calls upon the systemic change agent. The change agent then intervenes in the classroom to diagnose the problem, to facilitate problem solving between teacher and students, and to help the classroom group choose priorities and make some group agreements.

The job of facilitating classroom problem solving may last as short a time as one classroom period or as long as one classroom period a week for an entire semester. Whatever the time, it will be well spent because of the quality of the planned outcome: a control secure classroom environment. Educators have noted that students thrive in such an environment. Teachers also benefit from the new learning environment because it enhances both achievement and power needs. The process breaks the old vicious circle and substitutes a new beneficial circle of cause and effect. As students find their basic needs better satisfied, the teacher's needs for achievement and power are better satisfied, and the teacher becomes better able to satisfy the students' needs, and so on.

Teacher-to-teacher interactions. Except on an informal basis, such as small talk in the teacher cafeteria or in the faculty lounge, teacher-to-teacher interactions are a rarity in high schools. Another part of the systemic change agent's work is to reduce the isolation of teachers. Many avenues exist for the change agent's activities in this domain. Some examples are: a change agent facilitating a faculty advisory

committee as they struggle with problems of communication among staff; two curriculum departments working conjointly with the change agent to develop one common curriculum that satisfies both departments' needs; the change agent running a series of faculty in-service programs to help teachers exchange classroom techniques and methods; and the change agent encouraging teachers to work in teams, to share ideas, and to openly discuss school problems. By bringing teachers together to work on joint problems and by helping them to do that work collaboratively and productively, the change agent helps teachers satisfy their affiliation needs. As teachers make headway against their problems, their needs for achievement and power also become better satisfied.

Teacher-to-administrator interactions. Like teacher-to-teacher interactions, teacher-to-administrator interactions in high schools are rare. On the average, a teacher has a formal interaction with the principal or vice-principal once during the school year. The one interaction usually occurs when its time for the teacher to be evaluated. And in the evaluative interaction, the administrator holds all the power.

Some educators encourage school administrators to act in more collaborative and participative relationships with their teachers. The systemic change agent can assist the administrators in doing that. For example, if a principal has a decision to make about the use of extra school funds, the principal enlists the aid of the systemic change agent The change agent helps, for example, by collecting anonymous information on the problem from the faculty, by feeding back faculty reactions to the faculty and administrators in a large meeting, and by leading some faculty

representatives and the principal through systematic problem-solving stages toward a collaborative decision.

For teachers, collaboration and participation with administrators on important matters that pertain to the school's direction and governance can mean the satisfaction of power needs. The systemic change agent provides a means for teachers to control their own destinies by incergrating them into the administrative planning for the school. Affiliation needs are also met as teachers work with colleagues on meaningful tasks.

Teacher-to-parent interactions. Teacher-to-parent interactions happen infrequently at the high school level, and, when they do occur, they often bring consternation to both teacher and parent. The systemic change agent can act as a third-party consultant to facilitate the delicate negotiations between teachers and parents. In addition, the change agent can facilitate school-wide efforts to obtain greater parental input into the school's educational processes. Parental input, many believe, can strengthen the school's environment and lower teachers' frustration about parents who are critical of the school. As teachers and parents work jointly, new bonds of affiliation may be formed. Power and achievement needs are satisfied as successes are achieved.

A Matrix for Diagnosing

I have said that systemic change agents must enhance the satisfactions of three motives if they are to help a school faculty work their way out of their present debilitating conditions of work. The three

motives are achievement, affiliation, and power. I have also said that there are four fruitful subsystems within which the change agent can do that work: the subsystems of the teacher-and-student, teacher-and-teacher, teacher-and-administrator, and teacher-and-parent. When the change agent crosses the three motives with the four subsystems, the change agent produces a twelve-celled matrix that can be an aid to diagnosing the health of the school or classroom. Each cell calls for descriptions of problems and for the invention of remedial measures. The twelve cells, in effect, become a check-list of work to do.

Finally, I should point out that the change agent--the counselor or school psychologist--benefits from the new systemic role in the same way that teachers, administrators, parents, and students benefit. In the new role, the counselor or psychologist achieves visible progress in reducing the school's problems, acquires more initiative and power over his or her own destiny at work, and enjoys the affiliation with others in joint work. Rather than sitting day after day in a small office with an unending flow of individual complaints, the counselor or psychologist can become a leader in the revitalization of the school.